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ONE MAN AGAINST THREE PARTIES

By William Henry Chamberlin

The referendum of October 13, which led to ratification of a new French constitution by a narrow majority, was a trial of political strength between General Charles de Gaulle and the three parties which have been forming coalition governments in France since the liberation of the country from German occupation. These parties are the Popular Republicans (a predominantly Catholic party with a left-of-center social and economic program), the Socialists and the Communists.

The three parties had agreed on the draft constitution. It had been accepted in the Constituent Assembly by a large majority, 440 to 106. General de Gaulle had thereupon deliberately challenged a showdown by sharply criticizing the proposed instrument of government in public speeches and by urging the French people to reject it.

The parties prevailed over the man in the sense that the new constitution was accepted. About nine million votes were cast for it, about eight million against it, and there was a notably large proportion of abstentions.

But this close result was a Pyrrhic victory for the parties, especially for the Popular Republican Movement which emerged as the strongest individual party in the national election last June. For obviously the majority of members of the MRP, as this party is generally called, voted "No," as General de Gaulle advised, not "Yes," as Georges Bidault, Prime Minister and titular head of the party, urged.

Apart from the direct constitutional issues involved, I am inclined to believe, on the basis of impressions gained during a recent stay in France, that the referendum emphasizes three important facts of current French political life.

First, General de Gaulle, to many Frenchmen, is still a standard-bearer, and a rallying point. His personal prestige has not been destroyed by his abrupt desertion of the political arena last January, when he found it impossible to get along with the parties in the Constituent Assembly. He obviously cannot be written off in any long range horoscope of France's future.

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Second, French political life is suffering from a poverty of personalities. De Gaulle's hold on the public imagination is stronger because there are so few other Frenchmen of stature in public life to rival him. Some of the older political figures are discredited by association with the defeat of 1940. Others, like Leon Blum, have passed the age of vigorous leadership. Replacements from the younger generation are as yet inadequate and scanty.

Third, there is a widespread, bitter and cynical disillusionment with all parties and all politicians among many of the French people, especially of the younger generation.

II

De Gaulle's influence might have brought about a rejection of the constitution if there were not a widespread desire to end the "provisional" status of the present French State. For the last year France has been in the anomalous position of having discarded the old Constitution of the Third Republic without being able to frame a new one.

A first draft constitution, framed under strong Communist influence and designed to create an all-powerful legislature which, in turn, would be a convenient instrument for the dictation of an all-powerful party, was rejected by the French voters in a referendum last May. Both de Gaulle and the MRP opposed this project. Its defeat, followed by an increase in the vote for the MRP in the June election, reflected at least a slight ebb in the leftward tide.

The second draft constitution, which was accepted by the electorate on October 13, provided a few more checks and balances. There will be a Second Chamber (omitted in the earlier draft). But this Second Chamber will have less power than the pre-war Senate. The President of the Republic may nominate the Prime Minister (even this right had been curtailed under the Communist-favored draft); but the appointment must be ratified by an absolute majority of the National Assembly.

The MRP leadership agreed to support the new constitution after a long process of compromise and bargaining. But de Gaulle remained unsatisfied. It is his belief that France faces stormy times internally and internationally. A strong executive, he argues, is essential to the security of the State. Evidently a good many Frenchmen agree with him, or are willing to follow his advice. The influence of the three big mass parties, aided by a feeling that it may be better to have an imperfect constitution than no constitution at all, obtained a small affirmative vote in the referendum. But the stage seems set for an early and vigorous campaign for revision.

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De Gaulle has made little attempt to conceal his pessimism over the likelihood of increasing tension, perhaps leading to ultimate conflict, between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Saxon Powers. He has become anathema to the French Communists. His background is conservative and Catholic, like that of so many old regular French Army officers.

But it would be mistaken over-simplification to regard de Gaulle as an unconditional partisan of an Anglo-Saxon orientation. He is pro-French above everything else. Plainly and bluntly, in speeches delivered on the eve of the referendum, he stressed the argument that French interest, in this period of chronic international crisis, requires a strong executive, capable of taking swift emergency action.

Although the three coalition parties agreed in recommending acceptance of the constitution, they are not in hearty agreement on many other points. The tripartite character of the French Cabinet persists not so much because the three parties are in harmony as because no one of the three can form a hopeful bloc with either of the other two.

The MRP is the newcomer in French politics. It developed to fill a political vacuum. The former parties of the Right and Center had been weakened and discredited because some of their leaders were associated with Vichy. The considerable numbers of French men and women (for women's suffrage is one of the new political developments) who balk at voting Socialist or Communist found a medium of political expression in the MRP. The mass strength of this party seems out of proportion to the intellectual quality of its leadership. And it remains to be seen how this leadership will get around the embarrassing fact that the majority of the MRP voters preferred to follow de Gaulle in the recent voting.

The Communists and Socialists are old established parties. The Communists gained in strength during the war and are now the stronger of the two. One sees copies of their daily newspaper, L'Humanité, posted up all over Paris, along with denunciations of anti-Communist deputies, appeals to give Trieste to Yugoslavia and all the other familiar made-in-Moscow political slogans.

The French Communists are well supplied with money. There are rumors, difficult to verify or disprove, of subsidies from Moscow and of "liberations" of funds from banks during the confused period when the Vichy authority had collapsed and no new order had been established. The Communists control the largest French labor organization, the CGT, and hold various economic Ministries. Consequently they are in managerial control of some of the nationalized industries, such as coal, gas and electricity, and of the national arsenals, since the Communist

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Charles Tillon is Minister of Rearmament. Judging from the results of several national elections, about a quarter of the French people have acquired the habit of voting Communist.

The Socialists occupy an intermediate position in matters of internal policy and take a reasonable attitude toward the question of the peace. MRP and Communists have gone hand in hand in demanding the separation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr from Germany. But as this is one of the few points in which there seems to be a kind of negative agreement among the Big Three, France will presumably be obliged to settle for something less, perhaps for a loose federal organization of Germany.

IV

France, revisited in 1946, conveys some rather contradictory impressions. There are distinct signs of recovery from the very low point of cold, hunger and general economic prostration which was touched immediately after the liberation. A year of work on the repair of ports and railways is beginning to yield dividends. This year's harvest is much better than its predecessor. The ordinary French citizen feels less pinched and more at ease, although economic experts shake their heads over such problems as the steady, if still gentle, downward slide in the value of the currency, the shortage of coal and the heavily unfavorable balance of foreign trade.

At the same time France has been greatly weakened and impoverished by the war. There are victory parades and presentation of ceremonial swords to generals. One sees the inscription Rhin et Danube on the uniforms of French troops who participated in the closing campaigns of 1945. But the time has passed forever when French legions could overrun the valleys of the Rhine and the Danube, when France under a Louis XIV or a Napoleon could aspire to European hegemony.

While France is a cockpit of contending influence at home, its government tries to play the role of mediator between East and West, without much success up to the present time. If some of the sharper signs of economic distress are becoming milder, there remains a considerable fund of dislike and distrust, as between party and party, between class and class, between group and group.

One must expect that the political barometer in the Fourth Republic will often point to Storm.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. III, NO. 43

By Frank C. Hanighen October 23, 1946

Although President Truman opens the great international gathering in New York, Secretary of State Byrnes remains the principal formulator of American foreign policy, as well as our field general in the diplomatic arena. The United Nations Assembly of 51 States will carry on free and colorful debate on such subjects as the veto power in the Security Council, Spain, Iran, etc. The much more important Council will sit at the same time -- Gromyko, veto and all. And the Big Four Council of Foreign Ministers on November 4 will renew its Sisyphean labors on the peace treaties. But Mr. Byrnes must direct American strategy in all these meetings -- indeed an exhausting, and all too probably, discouraging task.

Intimates of Mr. Byrnes say that the exertions of the past year have told on him and that his physicians warn him of the danger of continuing his present pace. The Secretary, it is believed, is determined to see his job through, but he has not been unmindful of the physical hazard. The question of succession, if he reluctantly decides to retire, is therefore being discussed in some quarters.

If and when such talk becomes general, observers believe that something will be heard of Mr. Averell Harriman, recently appointed Secretary of Commerce. Those who would welcome his appointment to succeed Mr. Byrnes point out that he is young and presumably could stand the gruelling toil. He is a business man, yet he also has had links with the New Dealers. Like other graduates from the American Embassy in Moscow, he is an advocate of a firm stand in dealing with Russia. He has enjoyed more experience in the field of foreign affairs than Byrnes had when he became Secretary of State. Did President Truman, it is asked, have such a promotion in mind when he recently made Harriman a Cabinet member?

A question mark, in truth, must remain beside Harriman's name, while formidable competition in the person of Senator Tom Connally demands consideration. The Texan would be the candidate of the Southern Bloc, perhaps more powerful in White House councils than ever before. Mr. Connally is Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and has absorbed some experience in foreign affairs as a member of the American delegation to Paris and other conferences. Not unlike Cordell Hull, he has plenty of Southern temperament, which is not appreciated by correct State Department diplomats. Politically, he is not popular north of the Mason and Dixon line. Whatever the choice -- Connally, Harriman or someone else -- the appointee will be the legal successor (there is no Vice President) to the President. This fact alone ensures that the problem will receive prayerful exploration.

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Republicans are confident that their party will win at least the House and perhaps the Senate. Various Republican estimates of election prospects are suspect on the score of wishful thinking. But we are inclined to heed the forecast of one Republican source never in error on the side of optimism in recent years. During the Roosevelt era, this source was consistently "bearish" on the chances of his party in every campaign. The year 1946 has tinted his spectacles a tea-rose.

He believes that the Republicans in November will win the House and have a chance to take the Senate. He is convinced that the Dewey slate, including Ives, will win in New York. The Party in that state will chalk up a gain of at least four House seats -- one each in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Rochester. One more in the Bronx -- the district contested by Mr. Charles Garside -- is an outside chance. Congressman Marcantonio, however, is expected to win in the 21st District.

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Our friend takes seriously a very conservative report from Republican House leaders that lists 33 sure gains (26 is necessary for a majority) in the House; that does not anticipate any new Republican seats in New England, down as far as Connecticut, where two gains are confidently expected.

In the Senate, the GOP fight is "by no means hopeless." Seats in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Missouri are "practically conceded." Republican candidates "have the edge" in Massachusetts, Washington, Wyoming, New Mexico, Kentucky and West Virginia. This estimate would give the Republicans the bare nine seats necessary to control the Senate. But we should mention that other sources would substitute for the last three states named the trio of Montana, Delaware and Idaho.

These claims, it should not be overlooked, are for a Republican victory by slim majorities. The picture is indeed unclear. All depends on how deep and wide is the reported anti-Administration tide. One fact comes to mind: the Republicans underestimated their strength in 1942. They hoped for 25 seats in the House and 5 in the Senate; they got 44 in the House and 10 in the Senate. It may happen again.

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Two events -- one in Germany, the other in Iran -- are being interpreted as setbacks for the unremitting Russian expansionist policy. In free elections, Berlin voters were able to administer a strong rebuke to the Communist-dominated, Russian-supported "Socialist Unity" Party which ran a poor third, with less than 20 per cent of the vote. The Social Democrats, bitter enemies of the puppet party, had a big lead for first place and the Christian Democrats came second.

Russia had sought to build up the Socialist Unity Party by influence, bribery, intimidation and outright violence; but the stunning defeat now starts talk of abandonment by its Russian creators. German reaction against Russian sway in Eastern Germany is not the only cause of the upset. The New York Times (October 22) editorially assigns great credit to Byrnes' Stuttgart speech which gave the German people hope for Western assistance in resisting the ever-pressing tide from the East.

On October 20, Premier Qavam dropped all members of the Russian-controlled Tudeh Party from his cabinet and evacuated the strongest pro-Russian personality in his political entourage, Prince Firouz, by sending him to Moscow as Ambassador. The Tudeh Party last spring acted as the fifth column in Azerbaijan province, where the adjacent Russians made a strong bid for complete power, and more recently it has tried to exert influence in Southern Iran. But lately reports have indicated growing popular resistance to Russian and Tudeh Party control in Azerbaijan. And, in Southern Iran, tribesmen have rebelled on the score of Tudeh interference. Somewhat as in the German situation, resistance elements have been assisted and inspired by the active Western opposition to the Russian strategy. Britain is believed to have had a hand in the revolt of the Southern Iranian tribesmen. And, not unlike the Berlin voter, Premier Qavam registers the new balance of power by taking drastic anti-Moscow measures.

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When the Export-Import Bank last week refused to extend a loan to anti-American Czechoslovakia, it may have set a pattern in Washington for the distribution of international credit. This event has raised the question whether or not the World Bank ("Bretton Woods"), with headquarters in Washington, would follow suit.

Rumors have been current that it would not. The World Bank's Articles of Agreement specifically forbid the officers to be "influenced in their decisions by the political character of the members" who seek loans; only economic considerations should govern. But can the two be divorced? There have been reports that some of the "old Treasury crowd" which had shown considerable indulgence towards such refractory governments as that of Poland now occupy positions in the World Bank and

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have not left behind this attitude. In short, the Bank -- some claim -- might bypass American popular opposition (the Bank, unlike Export-Import, is an international, not a United States Government, institution) and place funds at the disposal of nations not co-operative with the United States in world politics.

The picture of the practical situation which the Bank faces does not confirm this conclusion. The Bank proposes to float loans on the money market, and this means Wall Street and to a less extent Canada. Such loans would have to prove acceptable to prospective purchasers; and it would seem highly unlikely that Mr. Winthrop Aldrich, for instance, would be disposed to recommend commitments to a loan for, say, Yugoslavia. It is believed that responsible parties near Broad and Wall have made this point clear to Bank officials. The President, Mr. Eugene Meyer, is said to plan a conservative policy for the Bank.

Although several nations have made application for loans, it is believed that France which wants $500,000,000 stands at the head of the queue. Both the State Department and the British Foreign Office are reportedly anxious that France should be given the means, as soon as possible, to return to economic health. If political conditions in that country prove satisfactory, it is quite possible that France will receive the first loan.

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Peace-over-China talk is on the rise. Chiang Kai-shek, after his defeat of the Communists in the capture of Kalgan, has offered to parley with those elements during a truce; and the latter, while not submitting to Chiang's conditions, have sent their General Chou En-lai to Nanking, Chiang's capital, to discuss matters. On the surface, this sounds auspicious. But we lift a finger of warning.

Historically, it is characteristic of Chinese "contending powers" to fight -- or often only to skirmish -- and then to agree to converse for a while before again resuming military operations. The cycle is classic -- and has been the outstanding pattern in domestic events during the past year. This picture may offer an explanation, but hardly any satisfaction, to exasperated Americans who have placed great hopes on the American-sponsored negotiations. It further suggests that the end of civil war in China cannot be guaranteed by the past week's apparently hopeful developments.

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We have called attention (June 19, 1946) to the rise of a group of western industrialists and financiers, independent of, and at times antagonistic to, Wall Street. On October 15, Mr. Robert R. Young, Chairman of the Board of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, and leading spirit in this group, crossed a Rubicon in his campaign for "independent railroads." He invited "the constructive elements" in the railroad industry to consider creation of a new organization, after his company and two affiliated roads announced withdrawal from the long-established Association of American Railroads. The C and O head accused the AAR of lobbying for three years for legislation to exempt it from anti-trust laws, "when its money and energies might better have gone to improve equipment and service, to fight for the billions in rail securities which are being unjustifiably squeezed out in reorganizations and to preserve a fair balance between wages and rates." Mr. Young further charged that certain eastern roads "control" the AAR and have maintained freight rates discriminatory against the South and West "for the purpose of perpetuating industry" in the eastern areas served by those roads.

But Mr. Young does not advocate a sectional, "East vs. West," business war. The new railroad association, which he proposes, would include not only railroad companies, but railroad security holders and railroad labor, "to promote free competitive enterprise in the interests of the public, the railroads, their employees and the nation's business."

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Notes and Quotes

The London Economist (September 21) expresses the current cautious note in British policy: "There is something very comical about the theory that 'British imperialism' is pushing America into hostility with Soviet Russia, when in fact there is growing anxiety in London over the persistence and precipitancy with which Mr. Byrnes is seeking occasions to challenge Russia. If anybody, at the moment, is driving anybody into hostility to Russia, it is the Americans who are driving the British. . . .

". . . Shorn of the silly anti-British nonsense, much of what Mr. Wallace is saying (in the long letter to President Truman, for example, which is far more statesmanlike than the New York speech) is what many people in England are thinking -- that Mr. Byrnes is going too far and too fast. But if Mr. Byrnes will retreat a step or two, he represents the active policy on foreign affairs which British opinion has always demanded from America. A Wallace awakened from childish nightmares about British imperialism, a Byrnes patient enough to wait and see whether a real Russian challenge develops, without provoking it -- either of these should find a willing partner in British policy."

The opinion that the United States is pushing Britain into hostility to Russia may appear astonishingly original to some. Yet it is not surprising to us. We have heard, and not without sympathy, several Britishers assert that President Roosevelt forced Neville Chamberlain into war with Germany.

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Those who pin their faith to the rule of reason would do well to consider the following observations in a discerning article by Mr. Huntington Cairns in the Iowa Law Review (May, 1946): "A philosophical approach to the problems of international law presupposes reason as the main instrumentality of analysis. But in the world today the role of reason as an effective tool in the exploration of the social process is held in many quarters to be irrelevant or futile. Reason is largely concerned with the discovery of truth or falsity, but it is denied that truth and falsity are pertinent factors. We are told that in the social process we must first determine what aim we wish to achieve. The aim we will agree upon is, of course, neither true nor false; it is merely the desirable goal under given circumstances, and it will vary from age to age and from country to country: in the case of a nation it may be military strength, industrial supremacy, individual freedom, economic security, cultural eminence or moral excellence. The choice of ends will be determined by preference, limitations, temperament, climate or by the fact that a nation is a young and vigorous people or a tired people, or according to Arnold Toynbee, the choice is determined by the intensity of the challenge with which a people is faced.

"We are told we can say that it is true or false that certain people at particular times have had this or that aim; but we cannot say it was true or false for them to have had such aims, that truth or falsity in the latter sense cannot be carried over into the value realm. It is argued further that when we have decided what we want socially we must then decide upon the best means to accomplish this end. Shall we do it by infiltration, by propaganda, by dollar diplomacy, by war? The Romans chose war and succeeded; the Spartans chose war and failed; the English chose trade defended by force and succeeded; the Athenians chose trade defended by force and failed. How, it is asked, can reason help make the decision?"

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Anti-climax Department --- Elliott Roosevelt comments on Truman's lifting of meat controls: "This is the beginning of the end. I am disappointed." (Boston, October 15, UP.)

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